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SUBJECT: ARAB-SOUTH AMERICAN SUMMIT: MISSING HEADS OF STATE
UNDERMINE CREDIBILITY

REF: BRASILIA 760

1. (U) On the eve of the Arab-South America Summit in Brasilia, one key point of contention is preventing consensus on the long-running negotiation over a Summit Declaration, according to the local press. On Sunday May 8, senior representatives from the Palestinian Authority and Lebanon, with Venezuelan support, continued to press for inclusion in the final Declaration language that would exclude acts of "national defense" from the category of terrorism. The rest of South America opposes the language. Foreign Ministers are meeting May 9 to seek a resolution to the impasse.

GUESS WHO IS "NOT" COMING TO DINNER?

2. (U) According to Brazil's Ministry of External Relations (MRE), all but four South American Presidents will attend the Summit (Vice President Francisco Santos Calderon will represent Colombia; Foreign Ministers Antonio Parra Gil and Maria Levens will represent Ecuador and Surinam respectively. Bolivian President Carlos Mesa canceled at the last minute due to pressing legislative issues.)

3. (U) However, senior attendance from the Arab side is well below GOB expectations -- and hopes. While Algeria's President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the principal Arab League organizer for the Summit, will lead the Arab side, an unexpected absentee will likely be Morocco's King Mohamed -- reportedly because of a spat over appropriate hotel accommodations for his oversized delegation. Minister of Cooperation and Foreign Affairs Mohammed Nasser Mansoor al-Khasibi will head Morocco's delegation. Arab Heads of State include Qatar Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Djibouti's President Ismail Omar Guelleh, President Jalal Talabani of Iraq (participating in his first international event as president), and President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority. The Comores Islands will be represented by Ms. Soule Abdou ElBack, President of the Autonomous Island of Ngazija. The Prime Ministers of Lebanon, Syria, and Mauritania, and Foreign Ministers from the rest of the other Arab League countries round off the expected attendees.

4. (SBU) Comment: While the Summit does not officially begin until May 10, Brazilian pundits already are debating whether the absence of most senior Arab leaders has softened the Summit's impact. We expect that locally, lower than anticipated turn out will also raise questions about President Lula's image as a global statesman. Five heads of state out of a possible twenty-two from the Arab League is a low batting average. Certainly, the absence of King Mohamed, a prime mover and shaker during preliminary meetings between the two regions, is a bitter pill for Brazil's leadership. The GOB had known for two months that Egypt's President Mubarak would not attend, however, it still had hopes for other heads of state, particularly from the Arabian peninsula. As Brasilia -- a city not accustomed to such international spotlight -- remains tied up in traffic knots because of security, some average Brazilians and journalists are asking why are we doing this?

5. (U) We will provide a follow-up report on the summit in septel.

Chicola